

Sustainable Problems with our Economic Structure

Brooke Van Baush

Matrix 2 – Advertisement Greenwashing



Greenwashing in advertisements has become the habit of corporations all over. While it may seem like a positive in the fact that these large stakeholders are beginning to take sustainability as a serious issue. They are in fact using the consumer's interest in sustainability as a form of manipulation, as they dishonestly advertise sustainable problems. Not only is this not addressing the problem of sustainability, but it is creating a level of skepticism amongst the consumers who will begin to no longer trust any form of green advertising – true or false.

When driving down the road, turning on the tv, or reading a magazine, one might get the feeling that one of the primary goals of our country is to provide its consumers with sustainable products. This false sense of security is created through the manipulation of corporations against the public as an effort to portray themselves as environmentally responsible while also masking their environmental wrongdoings. It seems like the main objective of the producers is to take the necessary steps in order to manage its ecological footprint, but unfortunately, this is all a façade (MacDonald). Companies are actually spending more money on advertising their products as being green than actually putting the

money into innovating technologies which could actually accomplish this. "Oil, chemical, and automobile corporations, along with industrial associations and utilities, were spending nearly \$1 billion a year on "ecopornography" and in the process were "destroying the word 'ecology' and perhaps all understanding of the concept" (Karliner). This brings up one of the major problems greenwashing has on our economy – public confusion. This danger makes consumers so skeptical they won't believe any claims of sustainability "Then we've lost an incredibly powerful tool for generating environmental improvements. So we don't want consumers to get too skeptical" (Dahl). This leads into the three main problems with greenwashing being that it is misleading, it creates an industry wide illusion of sustainability, and creates a relationship of distrust between the producer and consumer (MacDonald). As researched by Dahl, in 2008 2,219 of the products produced made green claims, yet 98% of them were guilty of greenwashing. This amount of greenwashing is based on polls taken in the early 1990s, 77% of Americans said that a corporation's environmental reputation affected what they bought (Karliner). So while it's positive that the consumer is concerned with sustainability, it is very unfortunate that corporations are using this as a way of manipulating consumers into buying their products rather than taking the opportunity to produce sustainable products that would benefit everyone.

Links

- <http://www.businessethics.ca/greenwashing/>
- <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=243>
- <http://www.wellsphere.com/healthcare-industry-policy-article/greenwashing-do-you-know-what-you-re-buying/1192329>

Bibliography and Annotations

MacDonald, Chris. "Greenwashing." *Greenwashing*. Arthur W. Page Centre, n.d. Web. 22 Oct. 2014.

- Chris MacDonald is a tenured Associate Professor at the Ted Rogers School of Management. He is the director of the Jim Pattison Ethical Leadership Program and hosts the Business Ethics Speakers Series.
- The main topic of argument for this text is the problems that greenwashing can lead to should it continue to be a corporations normal habit.
- The text starts by showing examples of greenwashing by companies which are clearly not environmentally friendly. He then speaks to the reason of this type of portrayal companies have and that they are in fact answering the calls of the consumer but in a dishonest way. Finally, MacDonald breaks down greenwashing into three reasons why it's wrong and detrimental to our economic structure.
- "What Ford failed to tell readers is that it only planned on producing 20,000 of its Hybrid SUVs per year, while continuing to produce almost 80,000 F-series trucks per month."
- "Greenwashing was coined by environmental activists to describe efforts by corporations to portray themselves as environmentally responsible in order to mask environmental wrongdoings."

- "The main objective of greenwashing is to give consumers and policy makers the impression that the company is taking necessary steps to manage its ecological footprint."
- This text helps to prove that the sense that our society is making sustainable changes in order to protect our climate are false. The typical consumer needs to be aware of the lack of effort these countries are putting into environmental products compared to the effort they're wasting on portraying their products falsely.
- The main objective of corporations is to portray that they are a sustainable company. Three of the main problems with greenwashing is that it is misleading, it creates an industry wide illusion of sustainability, and creates a relationship of distrust between the producer and consumer.

Karliner, Joshua. "CorpWatch: A Brief History of Greenwash." *CorpWatch*. 22 Mar. 2001. Web. 22 Oct. 2014.

- Joshua Karliner is a head researcher at CorpWatch.
- The main topic of the argument is that the more corporations spread internationally the more greenwashing occurs. This is in response to an increase in consumers' interest in green products.
- The argument is first made through statistics showing how much the common consumer cares about green products, which then led to corporations advertising their products as sustainable choices. The argument is then broken down into various nations who appear to be making these attempts, yet are actually still polluting just as much. Finally, Karliner speaks about the health problems these products are actually causing in third world countries, showing that greenwashing is a global problem.
- "As the contemporary environmental movement built momentum in the mid-to-late 1960s, undermining the public trust in many a corporation, newly greened corporate images flooded the airwaves, newspapers and magazines."
- "Oil, chemical, and automobile corporations, along with industrial associations and utilities, were spending nearly \$1 billion a year on "ecopornography" and in the process were "destroying the word 'ecology' and perhaps all understanding of the concept"
- "As economic globalization spreads, the world appears to be drowning in greenwash."
- The argument in the text speaks to the fact that corporations are pretending to give the consumer what they want, when they are actually just providing the consumer with a false sense of sustainability.
- Oil, chemical and automobile corporations are spending large sums of money on portraying sustainability and in the process are actually destroying the environment. In the early 1990s, a poll found that 77% of Americans said that a corporation's environmental reputation affected what they bought.

Dahl R 2010. Greenwashing: Do You Know What You're Buying? *Environ Health Perspect* 118:a246-a252. doi:10.1289/ehp.118-a246

- Richard Dahl is a Boston freelance writer who has contributed to EHP since 1995. He periodically writes for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- The text argues that Greenwashing has become the norm of the commercial industry and thus is in danger of creating a large level of confusion and cynicism the consumer has towards any form of environmental products, good or bad. This problem stems from the fact that there is no strict regulating system forcing a level of honesty.
- The argument is started by realizing the problem of greenwashing and by showing the statistics which would conclude that a large majority of corporations are dishonest. The article then

speaks about how at least some level of guidance might look in an effort to regulate this problem and how different systems and terminologies could be implemented. Finally, The article points out that greenwashing may have health impacts on a more personal level that is less obvious than the problems of public confusion

- “Compounding the problem is the fact that environmental advertising—in the United States, at least—is not tightly regulated.”
- “People aren’t really well-equipped to navigate the eco-babble, and so they end up buying products that don’t have the environmental or human-health performances that they expect.”
- “The huge danger of greenwashing is if consumers get so skeptical that they don’t believe any green claims,” he says. “Then we’ve lost an incredibly powerful tool for generating environmental improvements. So we don’t want consumers to get too skeptical.”
- This argument supports the fact that Greenwashing creates a false sense of security in our corporations and government, where our public and consumers believe they are receiving sustainable and greener products. In actuality, this level of trust will slowly deteriorate until there is an extreme disconnect between consumer and producer with zero level of trust and high skepticism.
- The danger of greenwashing is ruining the trust between producer and consumer. 2,219 products made green claims yet 98% of them were guilty of greenwashing.